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PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT IN THE AMERICAS AND CARIBBEAN REGION

The present document reports on and analyses major new trends and developments in UNICEF programme cooperation in the Americas and Caribbean region during 1991.

The UNICEF Regional Office has responsibility for cooperation in the following countries and Territories: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Montserrat, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, Uruguay and Venezuela.

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I. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

A. Economic, political and social challenges

1. In the Americas and the Caribbean, the 1991 per capita gross national product (GNP) increased by approximately 0.4 per cent, the highest increase in four years. The average inflation rate in 1991 dropped to 300 per cent, a significant reduction over the previous two years, but a serious burden none the less for the most disadvantaged sectors of the population.

2. Interest rates have fallen and external debts have been rescheduled. However, region-wide, the average ratio of interest paid to export income is estimated at 23 per cent, still far too high. In addition, employment figures for April to July 1991 in 7 countries, which represent 77 per cent of the region's population, showed an increase in unemployment over the previous year.

3. Stability is being achieved in the region as a result of democratization and significant steps towards peace in Central America. Those processes made progress in the context of new cooperative agreements in the Caribbean, Central America, the Southern Cone and in the Andean countries. Nevertheless, the increasing magnitude of poverty in the region - 270 million persons - threatens the political gains and represents an important factor in social instability.

4. The long-lasting and deeply-rooted economic crisis in the Americas and the Caribbean has forced several countries to adopt stabilization and adjustment schemes that have caused considerable hardship, especially among the most vulnerable groups. In spite of this, there have been two favourable developments: the creation by Governments of mechanisms aimed at compensating the costs of adjustment and the return to more favourable conditions that increase social investment through renewed national efforts, new external loans and debt relief for children.

5. Frequent themes in the new political agendas in the region include expanded dialogue, cooperative arrangements of various sorts and a move towards pluralism and increased participation. Such issues as armed conflict, border-related problems, the common interests of various groups of countries and the plight of neglected populations are now being debated.

6. The resulting climate has provided opportunities to achieve significant progress towards the survival, protection and development of children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by 25 countries in the region. Consequently, these countries are adapting their legislation, and, in the case of Colombia, major constitutional reforms have been undertaken in which children's rights are gaining recognition.

7. The efforts of UNICEF representatives, frequent visits of the Executive Director and his meetings with heads of State and national and public opinion leaders have made it possible to advance the causes of children and women and

strengthen their stature in the overall economic, social and political agendas of the countries of the Americas and the Caribbean.

B. Emerging trends

8. Many countries of the region have already launched national programmes of action and others will do so in the near future. In this context, the issues of continuity, linkage, implementation, monitoring and resource allocation are the main challenges. Advocacy must be continued to maintain the required levels of political, institutional and public support to transform country programme plans into action and to assess where and how UNICEF inputs can be used to greatest advantage. These topics were given special consideration in formulating the 12 country programmes prepared for the 1992 Executive Board session.

9. The ability of the UNICEF Regional Office and country offices to respond to the challenges of the World Summit for Children allowed countries in the region to take advantage of several political opportunities. A case in point is the Ibero-American Summit, comprising 19 Latin American and Caribbean countries, plus Portugal and Spain. These countries held their first annual meeting in Mexico in June 1991, during which they issued the Guadalajara Declaration. It emphasizes the importance that the Ibero-American heads of State attach to national programmes of action. Similar discussions were held in the Rio Group (13 countries) in Cartagena, Colombia, in December 1991, at the Central American Summit for Human Development, Children and Youth in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, also in December, and among Andean and Caribbean countries.

10. Groups of forgotten and marginal persons are receiving increased attention and there is a new drive to defend their rights. This is evident in the case of indigenous groups, persons of African origin, girl-children, children of the Amazon and children acting on their own behalf, as in the case of those attending the Caribbean Summit for Children in Barbados and children who took part in a referendum in Ecuador to ascertain the most important aspects of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this context, the region is developing several activities to maximize benefits for children in the upcoming International Year of the Family, 1994.

11. Operational arrangements involving other United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private sector institutions took place in 1991. As a result, a closer relationship was developed with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the context of the preparation and celebration of the Central American Summit for Human Development, Children and Youth. A wider technical relationship was developed with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to support countries in processing national household surveys and sectoral data and to monitor the goals for children.

12. Programmes of debt relief for children were approved in 1991 in Honduras and Jamaica, while efforts to this end have been made in the Dominican Republic and Ecuador. A "social investment and emergency fund" approach has been instituted in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Venezuela. Examples of collaboration in funding can be seen in Argentina and Ecuador (World Bank) and Central America (Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and World Bank). A joint effort with the UNICEF Programme Funding Office to increase funding through National Committees for UNICEF and bilateral donors was also made (e.g., with United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Spanish Committee for UNICEF).

II. HIGHLIGHTS OF PROGRAMMES, EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND OPERATIONS ISSUES

A. Health and nutrition

13. An agreement between the World Health Organization/Pan American Health Organization (WHO/PAHO), the United Nations Population Fund, USAID, IDB and UNICEF put in motion the preparation of maternal and child health components (MCH) of the national programmes of action. The interregional fund for programme preparation, promotion and evaluation facilitated this "agreement-to-action" process.

14. A continuing decline in immunopreventable diseases was observed in 1991, particularly with regard to poliomyelitis; only eight cases were reported in the region. Efforts to eliminate measles are under way in Cuba, the English-speaking Caribbean and Brazil. (The elimination of neonatal tetanus and measles are goals of the expanded programme on immunization (EPI), phase II, 1992-1995.)

15. In 1991, a cholera epidemic revealed appalling environmental and sanitation problems affecting vast segments of the population. In Peru, the hardest-hit country, the mobilization of women and the work of community oral rehydration units averted an otherwise far greater catastrophe. Immediate responses included an emergency appeal (still unfunded) and a regional training workshop. Longer-term efforts for the control of diarrhoeal diseases and of cholera are being planned through a regional agreement between the Junior Chamber International, WHO/PAHO and UNICEF.

16. A plan prepared by a regional consultative group aims to promote breast-feeding. Components of the plan include the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes, the UNICEF "baby-friendly" hospital initiative and the UNICEF/WHO "10 steps to successful breast-feeding". Examples of noteworthy efforts can be seen in Mexico, where an agreement has been reached with the baby formula producers to stop free distribution of baby formula as of I January 1992. In addition, important actions are being taken in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and Venezuela.

B. Child development and basic education

17. A seminar was held in February 1991, focusing on basic education and child development policies and strategies for Latin America and the Caribbean. This activity responded to the framework of action of the World Declaration on Education for All, which states that in 1991 countries were to develop supportive political environments. A set of printed and audiovisual materials was prepared that contributed to the creation of a common language on basic education in the region and promoted intersectoral political and financial support to improve basic education.

18. Moreover, as part of follow-up to the Conference, these materials were widely disseminated by UNESCO and UNICEF during a regional meeting of education ministers in Quito, Ecuador. Discussions regarding an operational agreement between UNESCO and UNICEF, which may include other partners, were initiated during the meeting.

19. The programme review process of the 12 country programmes of cooperation indicated that the new approach and emphasis on basic education have been incorporated and are being applied at the country level. Specific issues that link country and subregional conditions and opportunities were highlighted. Some examples are: integrated health, nutrition and psycho-social interventions for early childhood development (Chile); bilingual education (Bolivia); emphasis on family and better parenting (English-speaking Caribbean); and assistance to the handicapped (Central America).

20. A preliminary version of Facts for Life messages for Latin America, which includes a balanced perspective on health, nutrition and psycho-social development, was designed jointly by the UNICEF Regional Office and the Chile country office. Messages on psycho-social development were shared with all UNICEF offices in the region. These efforts will contribute to the new version of Facts for Life messages being prepared at UNICEF headquarters.

C. Children in especially difficult circumstances

21. The problems of children in especially difficult circumstances (CEDC) continued to generate wide interest and demands both within and outside the region. A total of 51 technical support missions were carried out.

22. Studies on child prostitution were prepared in nine countries: Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. Longer-term planning and monitoring were examined by a task force. As a result, CEDC goals for the current decade were established.

23. A series of materials on methodology and outreach was published in four languages and distributed world-wide.

24. Cooperation agreements with Childhope, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, the United Nations Latin American

Institute for the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders and Defence of Children International were established and actions were initiated.

D. Empowerment of women for development

25. Examination of the structural causes of the long-standing problems affecting women continued. Three areas were given special attention: violence against girls and women; women heads of household; and teenage pregnancy.

26. The network of women's offices throughout South and Central America was expanded with the addition of the Caribbean subregion. Staff training on gender, a regional workshop on planning of activities regarding women and an evaluation of cooperation in the region contributed to the girl-child components of the new country programmes. The main issues were incorporated in the regional plan of action for women in the 1990s. Cooperation with the Andean Parliament, IDB, UNESCO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Fund for Women and Radio Nederland led to collaboration in the areas of advocacy and communication.

E. Urban basic services, water supply and sanitation and environment

27. Implementation of urban basic services projects continued with activities aimed at establishing systems, promoting participation of the beneficiaries and using appropriate and low-cost technologies. The new country programmes plan to extend coverage significantly, while integrating these projects with other ongoing projects.

28. During the second half of 1991, a senior staff member responsible for the areas of urban basic services, water supply and sanitation and environment joined the regional team of advisers. A review of policies and strategies and an evaluation of experience in this area were carried out. The establishment of a method to exchange information on experience is planned.

29. Ongoing efforts regarding the environment and water supply and sanitation were examined (in the Amazon basin countries, Central America, Chile and Cuba). Efforts were made to carry out a situation analysis on the problems of women and children in the Amazon. In addition, the basis for collaboration with WHO/PAHO on the application of the water and sanitation monitoring system was established.

F. The Catholic Church

30. Exchanges of experience and cooperation related to child survival and development and CEDC represented a large share of cooperative efforts with the Catholic Church. Important meetings were held with the First Latin American Congress of the Church on Social Doctrine to consolidate child pastorate

activities within the Church. These meetings were combined with field visits to facilitate technical cooperation among developing countries. More than 12 countries were involved in missions to Brazil and Chile. Furthermore, studies on child-rearing practices and patterns are under way in Bolivia, Central America, Chile and Peru.

G. Monitoring and evaluation

31. During February 1991, a UNICEF regional colloquium on methodological, strategic and collaborative approaches to monitoring national programmes of action was held. The resulting plan is being implemented and includes cooperation with ECLAC and UNESCO. The fundamental objective of these efforts is to strengthen national capacity.

32. Important national evaluations (e.g., the analysis of the "Plan médico de la Familia" in Cuba) have been carried out. At the regional level, a mid-term evaluation of the Special Adjustment Facility for Latin America and the Caribbean (SAFLAC) took place in 1991.

H. External relations

33. Significant efforts were made in the region in the elaboration of the national programmes of action by Governments. In addition, follow-up to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Summit for Children was extensive.

34. "Children of the Americas", a multimedia package (print, radio and television) will be produced periodically starting in 1992, taking advantage of the commemoration in 1992 of the fifth centennial of the encounter of two worlds. This project was planned and designed in collaboration with all regional offices. Funding sources are being explored and a contribution from the Spanish Committee for UNICEF has been pledged.

35. Within the concept of the "third channel" for education, animated films are being produced (in Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador and Jamaica); a popular Central American health radio series completed a pilot programme on cholera (with assistance from Radio Nederland); and a television series for children (Plaza Sesamo IV/Mexico) is in the negotiation stage (supported by the Government of the Netherlands and the United States Committee for UNICEF).

36. The UNICEF Regional Office and the country office in Brazil sponsored the First Latin American Soap Opera Scriptwriters' Workshop, gathering, for the first time ever, the most important authors of the genre. The writers reaffirmed their commitment to increase the number of social messages in soap operas.

I. Operations

37. In order to improve overall management, a workshop was held that involved a wide cross-section of staff, from representatives to General Service staff. In addition, the regional office and country office in Colombia were restructured and the office in Nicaragua became a full country office with a representative.

38. The speed and quality of classification and recruitment of personnel were significantly improved. All staff working in this field were given training in more effective electronic data-processing applications, using a management and information system network.